

# HealthBriefs

Quick fixes, new research, home remedies

## Little-Known Tick-Borne Disease

First it was Lyme Disease. Now researchers want people to be on the lookout for Tick Borne-Relapsing Fever (TBRF). Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta believe that there has been a higher incidence than the 182 cases found in their study of health records and medical reports for the period from 1980 to 1985. TBRF has been seen in British Columbia and the northwestern United States, but it is not well known and often goes unreported.

TBRF is marked by a high fever, up to 40°C, that persists for a week, subsides, then recurs. Other symptoms include severe headaches, chills, and joint and muscle pain. Without treatment the symptoms can reappear more than a dozen times, says Neal Denhollander, head of serology for the Ontario Ministry of Health. The disease is easily treated with penicillin and erythromycin.

The ticks that carry TBRF live in bird and rodent nests in rural areas and lakeside dwellings, and feed nocturnally. Preventive measures include rodent extermination and wearing tick repellent at night.

If you believe you have contracted TBRF, call your provincial health office.

— Anna Filippone

## Drink, Drugs Don't Mix

If you're taking Seldane to relieve your hay fever symptoms, avoid drinking grapefruit juice. That's the message of David Bailey, associate professor of pharmacology and toxicology at The University of Western Ontario in London. In fact, grapefruit juice and certain prescribed medications, as well as behind-the-counter Seldane, can be a possibly deadly combination.

"There is something in grapefruit juice that we have not identified yet, probably several substances, that interfere with how the body eliminates the medication," says Bailey. His research reveals the juice inhibits enzymes in the small bowel from metabolizing certain drugs, including terfenadine (the drug in Seldane) and felodipine (a commonly prescribed drug for lowering blood pressure) as well as at least a dozen other drugs that have been studied so far. With Seldane, the juice can increase the amount of terfenadine in the blood system, which may result in the development of irregular heartbeats that can lead to death.

In the U.S., where 125 deaths have been



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reported, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is in the process of removing Seldane from the market, since a safer nondrowsy formula antihistamine called Allegra has just been approved. Health Canada says it is reviewing the FDA findings. "The chance of a life-threatening event is probably very rare," says Bailey. "But why risk it? There are safer alternative medications." — Kathleen Dore



COURTESY OF MEDIFLOW INC.

## Pillow Relieves Pain in the Neck

A Canadian-designed pillow for people who suffer from neck pain has received a stamp of approval from the Johns Hopkins University school of medicine in Baltimore. The Mediflow Waterbase Pillow scored well in a clinical study involving 41 people with benign cervical pain and associated headaches. The study reports that the pillow was linked with a reduction in the intensity of morning pain, increased pain relief and improved sleep quality.

On the market in Canada since 1995, the pillow was designed by Maurice Bard of Markham, Ont., and came into being quite by accident. Bard was nursing a neck injury, and one night his hot water bottle made its way under his pillow. From those humble beginnings sprang the Mediflow pillow. It features a thin, water-filled pouch that's encased in thermal reflector

fabric and positioned beneath a layer of polyester fibre. Bard says that the positioning of the pouch, which provides continual support to head and neck, and the insulating fabric, which ensures that body heat is not lost to the pouch, are the keys to its effectiveness. The pillow costs about \$60 and is available at drugstores. — Barbara Philps